Plan emerging to ease traffic congestion

Planning agency blueprint carries $216 billion price tag

By Conor Friedersdorf 11/74
STAFF WRITER

A $216 billion plan unveiled Wednesday proposes easing the traffic impact of 6 million more residents by 2030 by maintaining roadways, adding car-pool lanes, bringing in Mag-Lev trains and raising taxes.

The Southern California Association of Governments, a planning agency run by elected officials from six Southern California counties, offered a blueprint for dealing with the anticipated increase in vehicles on the Southland's roads.

"This is more than a long-term transportation plan. Destination 2030 represents a shared vision for a healthier, safer, more livable region," said SCAG President Bev Perry, who is mayor of Brea.

The plan calls for major projects. Among them:

■ $21 billion more for highway improvements, including more car-pool lanes.

■ A separate lane for trucks along the Pomona (60) Freeway corridor, extending from Long Beach to Barstow, to accommodate an expected increase in truck traffic between 70 percent and 216 percent.

■ A rail system to connect airports in Ontario, Los Angeles, Newport Beach and Riverside.

■ A significant expansion of Ontario airport.

■ Doubling Metrolink's carry-

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6 million new residents expected   1174

ing capacity.

The plan also lays out a strategy for funding the $216 billion in transportation improvements that it proposes, which will require rasing more than $90 billion in additional transportation funds. Suggested funding strategies include the following:

■ Raising gasoline taxes by a total of 10 more cents per gallon by 2015.

■ Dedicating all gas tax revenue to transportation improvements.

■ Convincing voters to extend the terms of existing countywide sales tax hikes, except in Riverside County, which has already extended a higher sales tax to fund transportation projects.

■ Charging user fees for lanes dedicated to truck traffic.

■ Amending the state constitution so that 55 percent of voters can approve transportation taxes, as opposed to the current two-thirds requirement.

■ Devising a way to tax alternative fuel as more people buy alternative fuel vehicles and gasoline tax revenue decreases.

■ Imposing a fee on developers to mitigate the transportation effects of new homes.

The plan assumes revenue from all of these sources, and overestimating any source could lead to a shortfall between the cost of recommended projects and transportation revenues available in the state.

Transportation officials at the agency said voters will approve of higher taxes for transportation improvements if they understand the consequences of doing nothing.

It was important to include a wish-list in the plan to give SCAG the authority to later apply for state and federal funding for the various projects, said San Gabriel Mayor Harry Baldwin, vice chairman of SCAG's transportation committee.

"We're evaluating truck lanes and truck highways along the 10/60 corridor," said Baldwin, referring to the San Bernardino and Pomona freeways. "The 60 (freeway) is one of the most heavily traveled by trucks ... and we need to find ways in which we can combine our traffic and trucks."

The agency will take comments on the plan in coming months, and officials expect that a revised plan will be adopted in April.

"This plan becomes a blueprint for what kind of transportation system we want to have," said Don Rhodes, SCAG spokesman. "A lot of the projects deal with moving goods from ports inland, so there are proposals for ways to do that through improvements to truckways, improvements to rail and ... magnetic levitation trains."

To read the plan in its entirety, or to comment on it, visit the Agency's Web site at www.scag.ca.gov.

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